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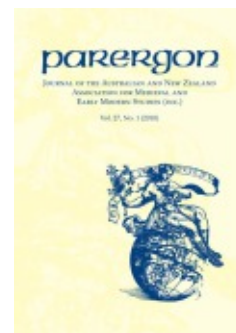
## **Inverse Invasions: Medievalism and Colonialism in Rolf Boldrewood's A Sydney-Side Saxon**

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## Inverse Invasions: Medievalism and Colonialism in Rolf Boldrewood's *A Sydney-Side Saxon*

Louise D'Arcens

Rolf Boldrewood's forgotten 1894 novel, *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, merits re-examination as a fascinating nineteenth-century medievalist vision of Australian national identity. The novel's vision of pastoral Australia depends on idiosyncratic notions of Saxon and Norman ethnicity derived from Scott's *Ivanhoe*. While Scott's portrait of post-conquest England dramatizes the ethnic and political conflict between Norman conquerors and subjected Saxons, Boldrewood consistently presents Norman and Saxons as two complementary sides of an English 'type' that is perfectly fitted to achieve the colonial settlement of Australia. Boldrewood's racialized vision of England's medieval past informs not only his novel's celebration of colonial meritocracy in Australia, but also its apologia for colonial violence and indigenous dispossession. As in *Ivanhoe*, however, the dispossessed Others of Boldrewood's novel continue to haunt the margins of its narrative.

### I. The Invention of Anglo-Norman Australia

In his amusing essay 'Appropriations: A Concept of Culture', John D. Niles offers a prospectus for an encyclopaedic 'Never-to-Be-Written Book' entitled *The Invention of Anglo-Saxon England*. The fourth chapter of this hypothetical book, on Anglo-Saxonism and imperialism, would, Niles projects, focus on '... [h]ow the movement of English-speakers to various parts of the globe was represented in terms that replicated the Anglo-Saxons' own migration myth, thus anchoring colonial and postcolonial political configurations in a mythlike narrative of national origins'. Offering this prospectus, Niles says, 'will do little harm as long as the book will not be written'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Appropriations: A Concept of Culture', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, eds Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 202–28 (pp. 210–11).

The bad news for Niles is that this book, which he pronounces too ambitious and too volatile to be written, has been underway for quite some time, and it has many authors. This essay aims to contribute to Niles' epic fourth chapter. Focusing on a single novel, *A Sydney-Side Saxon* by the Australian writer Thomas Alexander Browne, a.k.a. Rolf Boldrewood (1826–1915), I wish to explore its use of Anglo-Saxonist conquest myth as an historical allegory of free settlement in Australia. First published as a serial in 1888–89 and novelized in 1894, *A Sydney-Side Saxon* offers a pastoral vision of Australian nationhood that depends on notions of Saxon and Norman racial typology derived from Sir Walter Scott's account of post-conquest England in his novel *Ivanhoe*. While Boldrewood's account of Australian settlement does replicate aspects of Anglo-Saxonist conquest myths, he also transforms them by presenting Anglo-Australian settlers as the descendants of medieval invaders and invaded alike. I want to explore how this medievalist myth of origin offers Boldrewood's free settlers a two-fold mandate for their conquest and dispossession of indigenous Australians.

Unlike Boldrewood's famous *Robbery under Arms*, *A Sydney-Side Saxon* has been virtually forgotten by scholars and general readers alike.<sup>2</sup> This is partly understandable: on first reading it is a highly didactic story of a 'new chum

<sup>2</sup> In the scholarship on Boldrewood, *A Sydney-Side Saxon* is among a number of Boldrewood's works that barely feature. It does receive a paragraph in Chris Tiffin's 'Nationalism, Landscape, and Class in Anglo-Australian Fiction', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 17(1) (1986), 17–32; elsewhere, however, Robert Dixon treats *Robbery Under Arms*, *The Miner's Right*, and *War to the Knife* in *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender, and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 15–38. Peter Pierce focuses on *Robbery Under Arms* and *In Bad Company* in "'Weary with travelling through realms of air ...': Romance fiction of 'Boldrewood', Haggard, Wells, and Praed", *Westerly*, 32(2) (1987), 79–90; and *Robbery Under Arms* and *Old Melbourne Memories* are the focus of John McLaren's 'Rolf Boldrewood and the Mythologisation of Australia', *Meanjin*, 37(2) (1978), 251–56. Among those texts that focus on *RUA* alone in Boldrewood's oeuvre are John McLaren, 'Colonial Mythmakers: The Development of the Realist Tradition in Australian Literature', *Westerly*, 25(2) (1980), 42–50, Graeme Turner, 'Ripping Yarns, Ideology, and Robbery Under Arms', *Australian Literary Studies*, 14(2) (1989), 239–50, and John Docker, 'Postmodernism, Cultural History, and the Feminist Legend of the Nineties – *Robbery Under Arms*, the Novel, the Play', in *The 1890s: Australian Literature and Literary Culture*, ed. Ken Stewart (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996), pp. 128–49.

made good' – a naïve settler turned free-holding magnate – and is peppered with antiquated slang and what would now be regarded as unpalatable ideological assumptions. Furthermore, Alan Brissenden remarks of its plot 'the incidents are unexciting and the story remains dull'.<sup>3</sup> Yet I hope to show that it is of real interest today as a distinctive example of nineteenth-century Australian medievalism in which a deceptively simple 'rags-to-colonial-riches' story is framed within a complex – and indeed often confused – use of Scottish post-conquest England as a parallel for the relations of mastery and slavery in the Australian colonies.

Rolf Boldrewood, completed *Ivanhoe*, one of his favourite novels, many times over.<sup>4</sup> His life-long devotion to Scott is reflected not only in his adoption of the nom de plume Boldrewood, taken from the first canto of Scott's *Marmion*,<sup>5</sup> but also in an earlier pseudonym 'Templar', clearly a reference to *Ivanhoe*.<sup>6</sup> The influence of Scott is ubiquitous in Boldrewood's work, culminating in his final novel, 1905's *The Last Chance*, in which the characters journey to Scott's home Abbotsford and hold an impromptu 'Sir Walter Scott symposium'.<sup>7</sup> Of particular interest here, however, is the intriguing way in which Boldrewood reworks the medievalist vision of England in *Ivanhoe* to offer a medievalist national allegory to Australian audiences. Andrew Sanders has stated that '*Ivanhoe* ... set the agenda

<sup>3</sup> Rolf Boldrewood (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 27. Of the story's didacticism, Brissenden says '[i]t is a thinly disguised book of advice to new chums' (p. 27), a description which is reinforced by Paul de Serville's description of it as 'a moral and social homily', in *Rolf Boldrewood: A Life* (Carlton South: Miegunyah Press, 2000), p. 233.

<sup>4</sup> De Serville, p. 177: 'In 1898 he placed *Ivanhoe* top of the list of his three best novels of the century ... [I]t is, even for that date, a curiously old-fashioned choice'.

<sup>5</sup> The link to Scott is explicitly acknowledged in *My Run Home*, the text that features the visit of the protagonist 'Rolf Boldrewood' to his ancestral land, Boldrewood Chase. Looking around the Chase, 'Boldrewood' quotes from *Marmion*: 'that red king, who, while of yore / through Boldrewood the chase he led, / by his loved huntsman's arrow bled'. See *My Run Home* (London: Macmillan, 1897), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> De Serville, p. 150. De Serville also notes that Browne/Boldrewood's homage to Scott is evident long before he begins his career as a writer; for instance, the name of his first property, Squattlesea Mere, makes reference to Scott's *Woodstock*, as does the name of his first son, Everard.

<sup>7</sup> *The Last Chance: A Tale of the Golden West* (London: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 395–431.

for good deal of the debate about British nationhood'.<sup>8</sup> *A Sydney-Side Saxon* proves, as I will go on to demonstrate, that Sanders' assessment can be extended to our understanding of how national identity – and especially white national identity – was thought about in late nineteenth-century Australia.

The appeal of Scott for colonial readers and writers is undeniable and well-documented. One explanation for this popularity comes from Robert Dixon, who, though acknowledging that 'Scott wrote little that was directly about the empire', argues that 'his depictions of the Scottish Highlands were resonant with implications for England's colonies, past and present ... [which] goes some way toward accounting for his remarkable popularity in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand'.<sup>9</sup> Apart from Dixon's admirable study, accounts examining the colonialist implications of Scott's writing for writers in the British colonies have so far mostly focused on North American literature and Canadian writers.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, despite the frequent acknowledgement by Dixon and others of Scott's importance for Boldrewood, there has been a marked tendency to focus on the influence of the Waverley novels; only a few passing remarks have been devoted to the Australian writer's adaptation of the medievalist racial typology in *Ivanhoe* to create an allegory of pastoral settlement.<sup>11</sup> I want to redress these oversights in my reading of *A Sydney-Side Saxon*.

<sup>8</sup> "'Utter Indifference"? The Anglo-Saxons in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. and intro. Donald Scragg, and ed. Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 157–73 (p. 161).

<sup>9</sup> *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, J. M. Rignall, 'Walter Scott, J. G. Farrell, and Fictions of Empire', *Essays in Criticism*, XLI(1) (1991), 11–27, and Chris Ferns, 'Look Who's Talking: Walter Scott, Thomas Raddell, and the Voice of the Colonized', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 26(4) (1995), 49–67.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Dixon devotes a chapter of *Writing the Colonial Adventure* to examining the influence of Scott on Boldrewood as seen in *Robbery under Arms*, but does not discuss either *Ivanhoe* or *A Sydney-Side Saxon*.

## II. Racial Typology and Colonial Destiny

At the centre of *Ivanhoe*'s narrative is its famous portrayal of political and ethnic conflict between the dispossessed Saxons of post-conquest England and the occupying Normans. Throughout the novel the narrator's sympathies are clearly with the Saxons, who are presented as a robust, tenacious race struggling to defend their ancient warrior code and splendid oral culture against the haughty and duplicitous Normans. While the virile energy of certain Normans, especially Richard Coeur de Lion, is conceded, the narrator dutifully reminds us that Richard's kingship would later be marred by his rashness and romanticism.<sup>12</sup> Given this clear bias, the reader is surprised in the final pages to find the novel's sustaining conflict hastily dispatched, succeeded first of all by a compressed account of the Saxons' capitulation to Norman rule, and then by a celebration of Anglo-Norman fusion which is confusingly figured in an ethnically pure marriage – that of the Saxons Rowena and Wilfred of Ivanhoe. This apparent contradiction is resolved in the figure of Wilfred, whose combination of Saxon heritage and Norman allegiance makes him a kind of ethnic sublation or third term, a perfect synthesized Englishman whose marriage is attended by Saxons and Normans alike, thereby heralding a future of peace and intermarriage in which, to use Scott's famous summary, 'the Normans abated their scorn and the Saxons were refined from their rusticity'.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its abrupt entry into the narrative, this account of racial and social sublation is central to what Georg Lukács and others have described as Scott's dialectical historical vision, in which two opposing forces are integrated into a third complex entity that preserves the positive elements of both.<sup>14</sup> The novel's conclusion is also, as numerous scholars have pointed out, reflective of Scott's ideological vision of contemporary Britain, functioning as a historical allegory for the union of Scotland and England. While Scott's romantic attachment to the

<sup>12</sup> '... his reign was like the course of a brilliant and rapid meteor ... which is instantly swallowed up by universal darkness; his feats of chivalry furnishing themes for bards and minstrels, but affording none of those solid benefits to his country on which history loves to pause, and hold up as an example to posterity.' (Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 365.)

<sup>13</sup> *Ivanhoe*, p. 398.

<sup>14</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, intro. Fredric Jameson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, (1983), c1962), *passim*.

Scottish, most famously elaborated in the Waverley novels, is refracted into his affectionate portrayal of the Saxons, the novel's conclusion allegorizes his belief in the efficacy of a united kingdom in which Scotland is incorporated into British rule – or, in the words of Robert Crawford, a Britishness that 'makes full room for Scotland'.<sup>15</sup> A relationship of mastery and enslavement turns to partnership, with the novel's closing state of Norman rule being presented more as a kind of stewardship until the racial, political, and linguistic fusion of the English people is achieved.<sup>16</sup>

*A Sydney-Side Saxon* establishes its link to *Ivanhoe* within its first few pages, as its narrator-hero, the wealthy squatter Jesse Claythorpe, tells of his youth as an impoverished farm labourer in England. Although his very name, Claythorpe, connects him to the soil of his Kentish village, the young Jesse is determined not to end his days in the local poorhouse like his father and 'the other farm drudges' around him.<sup>17</sup> Jesse is anguished at his father's wretched fate; but his real resolve to avoid the same end, he tells us, comes only after he has encountered another enslaved man, a man whose image will haunt him all his life. That man is Gurth, the Saxon swineherd to whom the first section of *Ivanhoe* is devoted. So horrified is Jesse by the image of the collar soldered around Gurth's throat, and by its inscription proclaiming the swineherd a 'thrall' or slave, that decades later, reading the description to his grandsons, he can vividly recall its impact on him:

I couldn't get it out of my head for months afterwards. Here was a white man ... born a slave, and made to work whether he liked it or not ... [o]f course, it was a long time ago, when King Richard, the Lion-hearted, was alive. There couldn't be anything like that now. But when I began

<sup>15</sup> Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 53. See also Andrew Lincoln, 'Walter Scott and the Birth of the Nation', *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism*, 8(1) (2002), 1–17.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Ragussis emphasizes the ethnic complexity of Scott's vision of nationhood, arguing 'Scott attempts to overturn the conventional model of national identity, based in racial homogeneity, with a counter-model in which the racial intermixture between Saxons and Normans becomes the basis of cultural diversity and national identity in England'. See 'Writing Nationalist History: England, the Conversion of the Jews, and *Ivanhoe*', *ELH*, 60 (1993), 181–215 (p.212).

<sup>17</sup> Rolf Boldrewood, *A Sydney-Side Saxon* (London: Macmillan, 1894; Sydney: Cornstalk Publishing, 1925), p. 9. All references are to the 1925 edition.



to study things a bit, it didn't seem as if there was such a mighty deal changed in the present day. Wasn't father a thrall? A slave, if you like it better, though he hadn't a collar round his neck – leastways, none that you could see. (pp. 20–21)

Goaded Jesse out of despair and galvanising him to self-advancement, this medievalized image of English social inequity also drives him to dream of a future in a faraway place, a place where he might be 'more like Gurth's master than the poor swineherd himself' (p. 22). It is not long before this dream is realized: after a fortuitous encounter, Jesse manages to secure employment with Ned Buffray a visiting colonial pastoralist whose father evaded the poorhouse by emigrating to the land the locals call 'Horsetralyer' (p. 32). Eventually convincing Buffray to bring him back to Australia, Jesse's future career as a 'Sydney-side Saxon' is underway.

From this introduction to Jesse, it would appear that Boldrewood's cultural sympathies lie also with the oppressed Saxon heritage in England. Indeed, before reading even a line of this novel, the title *A Sydney-Side Saxon* suggests to us that our hero will embody the stalwart type so affectionately drawn by Scott. Yet this seems to be a misnomer, a carelessly bestowed title that is less indicative of the novel's racial typology than, one suspects, of Boldrewood succumbing to the unsubtle charms of alliteration. For, as I will go on to demonstrate, far from presenting Australian pastoralists as pure Saxons, throughout the novel Boldrewood develops an Australian type that takes up where *Ivanhoe* left off, transplanting Scott's Anglo-Normans to the Australian colonies, where their duty is to perfect and uphold their mixed Englishness.

Boldrewood's novel, it must be said, differs in inflection from Scott's; for while Scott's main interest lies in tracing the agonistic progress of history, it is, in fact, the theme of race in *Ivanhoe* that is of greater interest to Boldrewood, and more central to his vision of English settlement in Australia. His belief in the importance of racial vitality to Australia's future, evident throughout his work, is most explicitly stated in his 1901 miscellany *In Bad Company*, in which he argues 'race is everything', a comment that, de Serville notes, closely echoes the famous statement in Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby* that 'all is race; there is no other truth'.<sup>18</sup> Boldrewood's racial vision, I hope to show, actually leads him in *A Sydney-Side Saxon* to eschew a dialectical account of Australian nationhood,

<sup>18</sup> De Serville, *Rolf Boldrewood: A Life*, pp. 300, 375, n. 12.

preferring instead a model in which racial perfection reproduces itself. Discussing Boldrewood's abiding interest in bloodlines, biographer Paul de Serville claims that for the author 'the combination of Saxon tenacity and Norman enterprise defined the English national character'.<sup>19</sup> This notion, with its undeniably Scottian flavour, is borne out in the narrative of *Sydney-Side Saxon*, reaching its apotheosis in the representation of Anglo-Australian pastoralists as the perfected English type.

A preoccupation with the Norman Conquest's role in determining the English character is, of course, far from exclusive to Boldrewood and his hero Scott. Clare Simmons, Asa Briggs, and others have demonstrated extensively that this preoccupation was widespread in nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonist discourse, manifesting itself in a mass of writings, fictional and non-fictional, in which the Conquest's legacy was varyingly assessed.<sup>20</sup> Many were of the opinion that the equal admixture of Norman and Saxon produced a higher type, and in particular a higher Teutonic type, for there was strong emphasis placed on the German rather than the French origins of the Normans. Briggs argues that the Victorian popular reader had no need to 'choose finally between Saxons and Normans' because '[b]oth ... had contributed to the making of England, the England which had reached a position of world dominance in the nineteenth century'.<sup>21</sup> Others, while not denying William's victory at Hastings, nevertheless asserted that Norman blood was eventually diluted and the Norman race subsumed into the Saxon. One of the best known of these was the historian E. A. Freeman, who stated in his *The History of the Norman Conquest of England* that 'in a few generations we led captive our conquerors'.<sup>22</sup>

Boldrewood appears to be of the former camp, affirming and criticising both Norman and Saxon tendencies. Apart from his attested knowledge of Scott, and

<sup>19</sup> De Serville, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> See Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, c1990), Andrew Sanders, 'Utter Indifference'? The Anglo-Saxons in the Nineteenth-Century Novel', and Velma Bourgeois Richmond, 'Historical Novels to Teach Anglo-Saxonism', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, pp. 173–201.

<sup>21</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985–1991), vol. II, pp. 215–35 (p. 216).

<sup>22</sup> E. A. Freeman, *A History of the Norman Conquest of England*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan: 1873–76), vol. I, p. 2.

his possible knowledge of Disraeli, the extent of Boldrewood's familiarity with contemporary Anglo-Saxonist thought is not clear. His reference in *A Sydney-Side Saxon* to Henry Kingsley, author and 'brother of the great clergyman at Eversley' (p. 8), Charles Kingsley, suggests that Boldrewood may also have been familiar with the latter's 1866 Anglo-Saxonist novel *Hereward the Wake, the Last of the English*.<sup>23</sup> Whether his contact with Anglo-Saxonism was direct or indirect, I wish to argue that in *A Sydney-Side Saxon* Boldrewood makes a singular, and singularly colonial, contribution to nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonist discourse. His contribution lies in his novel's suggestion that it is in the colonization of Australia that the English fusion of Norman and Saxon qualities is most truly realized, and utilized to best effect. In his schema, Anglo-Australians realize their racial destiny only when they have *left* England, reclaiming abroad the freedom that is their lost birthright.<sup>24</sup>

As suggested by de Serville, it is the residual Norman quality of enterprise that impels the English colonist outward (or in this case Southward), just as it had in the Norman invasion. Much is made of the Norman ancestry of the colonist Ned Buffray, whose name, Jesse discovers, is derived from the French Beaufrère (p. 34). When Ned's father Stephen Buffray emigrates to Australia, his motive is presented not simply as a flight from poverty, but as a call of the blood, a kind of rekindled race memory in which he gratifies a colonising impulse inherited from his Norman forbears: 'it was time to try another [country], as his ancestor did, as he always swore was a soldier with Billy the Norman hundreds of years ago'

<sup>23</sup> Boldrewood's association with the younger Kingsley, author of *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, is recorded in Boldrewood's *Old Melbourne Memories* (London: Macmillan: 1896), pp. 172–73, and is discussed in William H. Scheuerle, *The Neglected Brother: A Study of Henry Kingsley* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1971), p. 24. The fact that Boldrewood gave the name Hereward Pole to the narrator of his 1890 novel *The Miner's Right: A Tale of the Australian Goldfields* is also suggestive of an acquaintance with Charles Kingsley, or perhaps more generally with Anglo-Saxonist discourse in England, in which the figure of Hereward, the Saxon resistance leader, made regular appearances.

<sup>24</sup> In this respect, Boldrewood's vision corresponded with what Dixon describes as a belief, particularly held in England, 'that the Empire was dying at its heart and must be reinvigorated by the new societies at its margins'. See *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 127.

(p. 30). In the first of the novel's inversions of the motif of invasion, an inversion laced with unacknowledged historical irony, it is suggested that the English race has inherited its colonising spirit precisely as a result of England's own subjection to invasion and foreign occupation, as well as to the long history of miscegenation that emerged out of this. This notion finds a striking echo in the preface to G. A. Henty's 1894 novel *Wulf the Saxon: A Story of the Norman Conquest*:

The arrival ... of the impetuous Norman race ... quickened the intellect of the people, raised their intelligence ... [and] has helped to produce the race that has peopled Northern America, Australia, and the South of Africa, holds possession of India, and stands forth as the greatest civiliser in the world. ... we can recognise the enormous benefits that accrued when in his turn the Englishman conquered the Norman, and the foreign invaders became an integral portion of the people they had overcome.<sup>25</sup>

Boldrewood again evokes the image of modern-day Norman settlement in *My Run Home*, where he claims that it is 'the old Norse recklessness' that leads young Englishmen of modest prospects to 'set up for themselves at Bunderabulla Crossing-place, the red River, or snow-capped Hokanui'.<sup>26</sup> This Norman colonising impulse is not, however, the only quality that makes the English peculiarly fit for life in the Australia. It is what gets them to the colonies, but not what makes them stay. Rather, in *A Sydney-Side Saxon* the Norman taste for invasion is repeatedly presented as working in tandem with an earthy Saxon stoicism that enables the English to weather the privation, isolation, and danger of their lives in rural Australia. This is perhaps best embodied in Jesse's second benefactor Sam Burdock, a former shepherd who has risen to become a pastoralist of considerable consequence and who helps our hero secure his first landholding. While Burdock's days as a sailor attest to his adventuring spirit, his stout build and tolerance of alcohol all mark him out as a descendent of Cedric, Scott's redoubtable Saxon thane. Similarly, Jesse is 'Normanized' by the fact that he too comes from an

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Richmond, 'Historical Novels to Teach Anglo-Saxonism', p. 186. This echoes a sentiment expressed in the 1860s by W. Trapnell Deverell, who argued in *The Norman Conquest* that the Conquest had benefited the English by creating a mixed race 'whose manifest destiny it is to, under one form or another, to subjugate and civilise the habitable globe'. Cited in Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans and Victorians', p. 232.

<sup>26</sup> *My Run Home*, p. 55.

adventuring family, in which one brother 'listed for a soldier and got killed in the Indies', while another 'went to sea, and was never heard of after', and a sister 'was married and went to America' (p. 6). It is, however, in his capacity to flourish amid the primitive conditions of bush living, that we see him draw on the unpretentious fortitude indicated by his Saxon name.

Yet the Saxon element also offers a mixed legacy. The main danger Boldrewood's improved Englishmen must avoid is their atavistic Saxon tendency to indulge their animal appetites at the expense of their sense of industry. Boldrewood presents us with the contradictory potential of the Saxon spirit to be pragmatic yet also hedonistic and ultimately degenerate. This notion corresponds with Scott's own rather mixed characterization of the Saxons. Despite his evident affection for them, especially in the robust Cedric, Scott's portrayal of the Saxons also indicates the presence of characteristics that suggest a racial unfitness to rule. These qualities, which include the 'hereditary vice of drunkenness', gluttony, and brawn unsupported by intelligence, are embodied in the oafish character of Athelstane the Unready, who despite being 'the last scion of Saxon royalty', readily relinquishes his right to rule, preferring to embroil himself in petty squabbles with the local abbot. With his animal appetites, as well as his 'passive courage and meek good nature' (p. 73), Athelstane embodies the Saxon-type that Thomas Carlyle would later ungenerously depict as 'lumbering about in pot-bellied equanimity'.<sup>27</sup> Deploying a notion of racial degeneration, Scott suggests that Athelstane's sluggish, irresolute nature is one of the 'infirmities' he has inherited from his 'ancient royal race' – a race which, it later becomes clear, is fast approaching its end.<sup>28</sup>

Just as Cedric's legacy is clearly evident in the rugged Anglo-Australian pastoralists discussed above, Athelstane can also claim a descendant in Boldrewood's character Jack Leighton. Leighton is a former young gentleman colonist from Jesse's home region who 'belong[s] to one of the oldest families in England' (p. 130), but whose alcoholism has led him to squander his opportunity to flourish in the colonies. When Jesse first encounters Leighton, he is shocked to find the erstwhile gentleman reduced to a broken-down swagman, begging for work from men who were once his social inferiors. That this fall is due to Leighton's

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Frederick the Great*, vol. I (1858), p. 415; cited in Briggs, 'Saxons, Normans, and Victorians', p. 215.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivanhoe*, p. 73.

degenerate Saxon spirit is implied when we are pointedly told that his family lived in the same region 'since King Harold's time ... before the battle of Hastings' (p. 134). In linking Leighton's alcoholism to his racial heritage, Boldrewood is not only glancing off Scott, but also reflecting what William Greenslade has described as 'the persistent grip of degeneration on late nineteenth-century culture'. In his study of the Victorian preoccupation with theories of degeneration, Greenslade points out that notions of racial degeneration were disseminated via post-Darwinian 'discourses of reversion and atavism, the "up-cropping" of the "bestial"' – discourses that, he further argues, articulated the anxieties of the late Victorian propertied classes about, among other things, their 'national and imperial fitness'.<sup>29</sup> Considered in this light, Leighton functions as a significant cautionary figure, an embodiment of a racial tendency that must be suppressed if one is to prosper in the colonies. This medievalist vision of the English race sets *A Sydney-Side Saxon* apart from those nineteenth-century Australian romances that dwelt anxiously on the belief that, to quote Dixon, '[c]olonialism involves the erosion of an originary Englishness ... leaving a vacancy in which the white man can regress'.<sup>30</sup> Through his degenerate colonial Saxon, Boldrewood suggests that this tendency toward regression is in fact endemic to 'originary Englishness'. It might be exacerbated by colonialism, but it is not caused by it.

It is thus significant that the image of the slave's collar reappears whenever Boldrewood evokes the notion of Saxon degeneracy. Musing on Leighton's alcoholism, Jesse describes him as 'another Gurth; the thrall of the tyrant vice, and no smith may strike off his fetters' (p. 143). The threat of the thrall's collar again returns, though more obliquely, at the only moment where womanly temptation figures in the narrative, when Jesse is warned against 'get[ting] collared on Poss Barker' (p. 89), the beautiful half-Aboriginal woman with whom he later becomes infatuated. What this image suggests, in both cases, is that the 'collar' of social degradation, far from being a yoke imposed from without, by tyrannical rule or social subjection, is in fact for Boldrewood the result of a Saxon failure to master one's own worst ingrained tendencies.

The image of the collar points to the other Saxon failing that must be forsworn: the tendency to accept subjection as one's historical destiny. In this respect Jack

<sup>29</sup> See William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 2, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 64.

Leighton is the novel's ultimate Saxon: not only is he an alcoholic, but he seems also to have accepted his humiliating fall in the world with a complacency that echoes that of Athelstane. Similarly, before either Jesse Claythorpe or Stephen Buffray become colonists, they are linked by the fact that this Saxon complacency, signified by the 'invisible collar' worn by Jesse's father, has reduced their families to a state of resignation about their poverty and enslavement within England's class system: in short they have both become Gurths – 'white men born slaves'. It is true that for Boldrewood, Gurth's enslavement appears to function as an indicator of his standing in the social order – he is, after all, as Jesse's recollection of Scott emphasizes, the 'thrall' not of the Norman invaders but of Cedric, a higher-ranking Saxon. It is, nevertheless, ultimately the fact that he is a 'son of Beowulf' that makes him serviceable within Boldrewood's racial economy as an image of Saxon apathy. Boldrewood's determination to interpret Gurth as a Saxon slave-type becomes especially apparent when we consider that despite the fact that he knew Scott's novel intimately, he not only withholds mention of the 'disposition to resistance' that Scott says lies beneath the swineherd's despondency,<sup>31</sup> but also suppresses all but the barest mention of Gurth's subsequent rise in the world: Jesse's comment that Gurth later became 'a knock-about man' (p. 18), a term otherwise used to describe Jack Leighton, is distinctly at odds with Scott's rather more lavish promotion of the swineherd to the rank of squire attending Wilfred of Ivanhoe. Within Boldrewood's novel's economy, Gurth is thus emblematic of the destiny of England's rural poor unless they break free of their predicament – not by rising up against oppression, but by shaking off their Saxon apathy and exercising their racial prerogative to thrive in other lands where they will be masters.

This way of reading this text brings it more into line with the concerns of Boldrewood's other works. Scholars have noted with some puzzlement that this text is anomalous in Boldrewood's *oeuvre* for its apparent concern for the plight of the poor, and for featuring a low-born protagonist, rather than his usual floridly-named members of the pastoral gentry. I want to suggest, however, that while the novel does acknowledge the existence of social oppression, both its explanation and its solution for this are racialized. Enslavement is not so much a product of social inequality as of the failure to master one's worst racial instincts. Anyone

<sup>31</sup> 'the fire which occasionally sparkled in his red eye manifested that there slumbered under the appearance of sullen despondency, a sense of oppression, and a disposition to resistance' (*Ivanhoe*, pp. 19–20).

who experiences poverty in Australia has created their own situation, as seen not only in the case of Jack Leighton, but also in that of the ungrateful beggar Jesse encounters in Sydney, who complains when he is given small change. Clearly the opposite of the industrious pastoralists, this urban beggar wears a sign around his neck that marks his inheritance of the Saxon collar of apathy and subjection. Boldrewood's solution to social inequality is thus what could be described as a system of racial meritocracy, in which Norman ambition and Saxon thrift and industry are brought into perfect balance. It is significant that while Australia is, on the one hand, the perfect environment for the Anglo-Norman type, it also endangers him, exposes him to the danger of dis-integration into his component parts. The successful colonists of *A Sydney-Side Saxon* overcome this, and are offered to the reader as antipodean Ivanhoses, perfectly integrated English types who, due to sunshine, plentiful food, and freedom, are happier, healthier, and more attractive than their counterparts at home.

The deep appeal for Boldrewood of the Anglo-Australian *übermensch* is also reflected in its centrality to his own fantasized self-image as pastoralist. Despite the fact that in life his pastoral career ended in abject failure, Boldrewood's authorial identity was, like so many of his heroes, that of a transplanted English nobleman. This is nowhere more apparent than in his adoption of the *nom de plume* Rolf Boldrewood. By taking this name, which is first given to the narrator-hero of his semi-fictional travel memoir *My Run Home*, the author bestowed upon himself an ancient fused English lineage in which his ancestor Rolf, despite being a Norseman, fought with Harold at the Battle of Hastings and then went on to marry Edelgitha, the Saxon heiress of Boldrewood Chase.<sup>32</sup> It is this mixed identity that, within his own paradigm, guarantees his ascendancy in Australia.

<sup>32</sup> *My Run Home*, pp. 63–64. In adopting this identity, Boldrewood also, somewhat fancifully, claims descent from the world of *Ivanhoe*: 'here stood the mighty oaks, the lofty elms, which might have been saplings when Gurth and Wamba sang their roundelay', p. 60. The adoption of Boldrewood as a nom-de-plume, as well as the author's transformation of his birth-surname 'Brown' to the more Anglo-Norman 'Browne' on the death of his Irish father in 1864, reflects his conformity to what Sophie Gilmartin has described as a tendency, from 1830 on, to present English pedigrees as 'an ancient mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman'. See Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 5.



From this it becomes apparent that although Boldrewood largely retains the ethnic paradigm of *Ivanhoe*, he turns Scott's allegory of Anglo-Scottish unification into a meritocratic allegory of social inversion in the colonies, where the industrious English poor prosper and the slothful and hedonistic rich are brought low.

### **III. Dispossession and Miscegenation: Boldrewood's Medievalist Blind-Spot**

Another explanation for this novel's anomalous focus on class is that its surface narrative of social inversion between white settlers enables Boldrewood to avoid dealing with the other obvious ramification of colonial occupation in Australia. Boldrewood's preoccupation with the racial fall-out of the Battle of Hastings exposes a crucial blind-spot in his narrative: for so concerned is this novel with the contending elements of the English racial character, it cannot accommodate or even fully acknowledge the enslavement and dispossession of indigenous Australians, who are, more than even the most subjected of Boldrewood's Saxon-types, the true Others of his story.

I wish to suggest that Boldrewood's endorsement of the Norman colonising spirit of English settlers leads him to naturalize their dispossession of indigenous lands, and their subjugation of indigenous people. As mentioned earlier, through the suggestion that their emigration to Australia is an atavistic repetition of William's victory at Hastings, these settlers are presented as simply responding to a racial compulsion to impose themselves on those whom they vanquish. This is most tellingly illustrated at the point in the novel where young Jesse, having only recently arrived in Australia, buys himself an Aboriginal servant. Given his abiding horror at the idea that Gurth had been another man's property, it is striking, to say the least, that Jesse does not hesitate when offered the opportunity to purchase and, in his words, 'break in' (p. 66) Talgai, whom he also allows to address him as 'master'. He abhors the inequities of post-conquest English social organization, and its residual effects in the England of his youth, yet his own

success as an Australian pastoralist relies undeniably on a colonially inflected continuation of slavery.<sup>33</sup>

It is true that Jesse's treatment of Talgai is benevolent when compared to the latter's former owner Jim Roper, the whip-brandishing overseer whose name reflects both his cruel subjection of Aboriginal stockmen and his theft of neighbours' cattle.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, despite Talgai being the only genuinely enslaved person in the story – he is another man's property – Jesse accepts his ownership of this man as not only his racial prerogative, but Talgai's racial destiny. This highlights that for Jesse the main source of consternation is not that Gurth was a slave, but that he was 'a *white* man born a slave'. His anxiety about this implicitly naturalizes the relationship between blackness and slavery, reflecting the hegemonic colonialist ideology in which, to quote Ania Loomba, 'certain sections of people [the non-white, indigenous population] were ... racially identified as the natural working classes'.<sup>35</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that this Norman will-to-domination would be offset, and even softened somewhat, by Boldrewood's paradoxical representation of Anglo-Australian settlers as also descended from the subjected and dispossessed Saxons. Yet in fact the opposite takes place. The Saxon racial memory of oppression ultimately functions in the novel to reinforce, rather than undermine, the white settlers' mandate to control the indigenous population. The repeated recourse to the heritage of the Saxons as a dispossessed people allows the novel to admit the notion of imperial conquest into the narrative, and yet to do so in a way that downplays and even disavows the English role in the subjection of Australia's indigenous population. It is true that the evocation of Saxon dispossession is a standard trope in nineteenth-century texts expounding the so-called 'Norman

<sup>33</sup> For two well-known studies dealing with the perpetuation of pre-modern labour relations in colonial societies, see Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Sociological Theories, Race, and Colonialism* (Paris: Unesco, 1980), pp. 205–45, and John Rex, 'Theory of Race Relations: A Weberian Approach', in the same volume, pp. 116–42.

<sup>34</sup> Roper appears in the novel as both a foil to Jesse and an echo of the brothers Malvoisin, Scott's vicious and – true to their name – unneighbourly Normans whose cruelty, like Roper's, is punished at the novel's end.

<sup>35</sup> *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 126.

Yoke' thesis of post-conquest England.<sup>36</sup> I want to suggest, however, that this trope's valency is significantly transformed when it is adopted by a colonial writer who lives in an environment where dispossession is so manifestly the lot of others, and is so clearly brought about by British colonialism. In the hands of Boldrewood, the figure of Gurth becomes an *idée fixe*, a recurrent image of what could be described as the colonial bad conscience of the novel, reflecting a desire to mention the unmentionable – colonial oppression – but following a logic of reversal in which the victors are figured as the victims.<sup>37</sup> Just as Jesse remembers Gurth's collar but tellingly forgets Scott's image of the Jew Isaac of York being dragged by a rope around his neck,<sup>38</sup> so too his fixation on the fictional 'white man born a slave' with his symbolic collar shifts his attention away from the real black slaves, with very real collars, whom he would have encountered repeatedly in the course of his decades in the colony. The English can thus retain the righteousness reserved for the injured, as well as asserting their right to regain their historical destiny through conquest.

To invoke Fredric Jameson's famous formulation, it is this idiosyncratic justification for colonial domination that most strikingly reveals the 'political unconscious' in Boldrewood's narration of pastoral Australia. In Jameson's influential theory, literature is positioned as a repository of a society's repressed ideological desires, tensions, and conflicts, projecting and displacing them into fictional narrative. Appropriating psychoanalytic terminology, Jameson asserts that through our encounters with literary narrative that we can recognize the ways in

<sup>36</sup> The 'Norman yoke' thesis, which argued that the constitutional freedoms enjoyed in Anglo-Saxon England had been stripped away post-Conquest and replaced by an oppressive occupying rule, was especially significant for those arguing for parliamentary and suffrage reform in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. For a summary of this phenomenon, see Christopher Hill's famous essay 'The Norman Yoke', in *Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr*, ed. J. Saville (London: 1954), pp. 11–66.

<sup>37</sup> According to J. J. Healy, this simultaneous admission and disavowal is found elsewhere in Boldrewood's discussion of indigenous Australians: 'Boldrewood got the pieces of the tragedy [of indigenous dispossession] together, only to shift them in directions of evasion' (pp. 52–53). See the chapter 'Squatter Reflections', in *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770–1975* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), esp. pp. 49–60.

<sup>38</sup> *Ivanhoe*, p. 279.

which different societies have attempted to resolve these conflicts.<sup>39</sup> This approach is, I would argue, particularly efficacious for reading *A Sydney-Side Saxon* because it allows us to grasp how Boldrewood's schizophrenic medievalized image of the Australian settler as both conqueror and conquered, master and slave, exposes the guilt of white colonial occupation even as it aims to disavow it.<sup>40</sup>

The clearest parallel between Boldrewood's Aborigines and Scott's Saxons is that the Aborigines are also presented as a doomed race that can only decline under the yoke of foreign occupation. However, while Scott's Saxons go down only after a fight that dominates the narrative, Boldrewood's novel admits no real Aboriginal resistance,<sup>41</sup> and rests on the Social Darwinist assumption that an indigenous demise is not only inevitable but humane, as is made explicit in a comment Jesse makes about Talgai:

He was fond of smoking – nearly all blacks are, and why shouldn't they?  
... It doesn't shorten their lives that I've ever seen; and if it did, why – no  
great matter either. (p. 66)

Here, the prospect of Talgai's death by smoking is presented as a blessed release from a life lived away from his dispersed kin; but there is no reference to the cause of his people's dispersal. It is this presentiment of Aboriginal extinction that licenses what is, for Boldrewood, a generous portrait of their traditional existence.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> Robert Dixon has discussed the usefulness of Jameson's theory for reading other Boldrewood texts, most notably *The Miner's Right*, which he describes as 'a text disfigured by stylistic, ideological, and psychological inconsistencies'. See *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> A brief reference to a place called Murdering Creek (p. 71) is the novel's only reference to what might have been conflict between indigenous and invader. This is in contrast to other texts such as *Old Melbourne Memories* where indigenous/squatter conflict is acknowledged.

<sup>42</sup> Tim Bonyhady makes a comparable point about the apparently benevolent and nostalgic representations of traditional indigenous life in those nineteenth-century paintings he describes as 'Aboriginal arcadias'. Bonyhady says 'many of the colonial purchasers of Aboriginal landscapes were probably only able to appreciate these paintings only because the Aborigines were no longer a threat to European settlement'. See *Images in Opposition; Australian Landscape Painting 1801–1890* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 25.

Speaking of her 'poor mother's people, that had the country before [the settlers]', Possie evokes a former time in which

They never wanted any grog; they lived where God placed them; they hunted and fished from one end of their 'tauri' to the other; and when their time came, died without fear or pain. (pp. 96–97)

This offers a welcome relief from Boldrewood's more typical representations of indigenous people as treacherous, mendacious, and violent.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the idyllic image Boldrewood evokes of peaceful and painless death is common to those Darwinist-inflected accounts that naturalized the disappearance of this people in such a way as to distance it from any connection with colonial violence.

In creating a narrative where the two English types contend against a third ethnic group, Boldrewood is again following Scott. For although, as I have discussed, the novel dwells primarily on the tension between Saxons and Normans, the real Others of *Ivanhoe* are the Jews of England. It is repeatedly emphasized throughout Scott's narrative that despite their differences the two main opponents are linked by their shared Christian faith; as Isaac says, 'Saxon or Norman will be equally ashamed of the poor Israelite'.<sup>44</sup> While many have condemned Scott's portrayal of the Jews, I am in agreement with scholars such as Michael Ragussis, and John Morill and Wade Newhouse, in contending that, its ethnic stereotypes notwithstanding, Scott's portrait of the Jews, especially Isaac's beautiful daughter Rebecca, is generally sympathetic and attentive to the ultimatum of assimilation or expulsion that hangs over them.<sup>45</sup> They are presented throughout as a kind of

<sup>43</sup> One example of this is Boldrewood's assertion that aborigines possess 'an unworthy, treacherous disposition, ready at all times to assert itself in acts of violence', in the article 'The Truth about Aboriginal Outrages', *Life*, 6 June 1903, p. 544. McLaren also discusses Boldrewood's representations of indigenous violence in *Old Melbourne Memories*, in 'Rolf Boldrewood and the Mythologisation of Australia', pp. 251–53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivanhoe*, p. 59. Scott extends this sentiment further when his narrator says 'Norman, Saxon, Dane, and Briton, however adverse these races were to each other, contended which should look with greatest detestation upon a people, whom it was accounted a point of religion to hate, to revile, to despise, to plunder, and to persecute', p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> See Ragussis, 'Writing Nationalist History', 181–215, and John Morrill and Wade Newhouse, 'History, Romance, and the Divine Sound of Truth in *Ivanhoe*', *Studies in the Novel*, 32(3) (Fall 2000), 267–95.

supplement to the Christian community, separate and yet necessary both as a source of funds and as scapegoats whose marginalization helps define that community. And yet unless they convert, as they are repeatedly pressured to do, they cannot be incorporated into that community. Rebecca desires Ivanhoe but Scott suggests that any union between them, however tantalising, is impossible. This refusal leads to the text's famously and, in Ragussis's view, deliberately unsatisfactory ending, in which the rather insipid Saxon heiress Rowena marries Ivanhoe, while the worthy Rebecca eschews English protection to tend the sick in Moorish Granada. Thus, while at the end of Scott's novel Jews will survive, this must take place elsewhere in the diaspora, away from the now happily Anglo-Normanized England.

While Boldrewood never mentions Scott's Jews, one cannot help but note the echoes between their plight and the position of indigenous Australians in *A Sydney-Side Saxon*. Both are dispossessed and dislocated from their own people; but what differentiates Boldrewood's indigenous characters is that unlike the diasporic Isaac and Rebecca, they are homeless in their own home; they have nowhere else they can take refuge, so their demise under colonialism is, as mentioned earlier, guaranteed. The only hope for Aboriginal 'survival', if indeed it can be called that, in Boldrewood's novel appears to be via miscegenation. Possum ('Possie') Barker, the half-Aboriginal daughter of a white pastoralist, on the surface appears to be the novel's 'poster girl' for miscegenation. Jesse says that she and her sister are 'a deal better looking [than English girls] and walked and held themselves better' (p. 115). Unlike Warrigal, the insidious half-caste tracker in *Robbery under Arms*, Possie is beautiful and accomplished, and appears to combine the best of her mother, who is described as a 'good-looking gin', with an English instinct for culture and refinement. Jesse is dazzled by her, and, despite numerous warnings, eventually resolves to marry her. Like Scott, who depicts Rebecca as a worthy and alluring partner for Wilfred of Ivanhoe, Boldrewood eroticizes the prospect of miscegenation in the figure of Possie as a kind of 'dark mistress'.<sup>46</sup> One significant difference, however, is that while Rebecca's Jewishness is always evident in her dark person and her Oriental costume, Possie is a more liminal figure who can 'pass' for white; indeed Jessie says he has known English girls as dark as Possie and her sister.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> A comparable embodiment of the dangerous pull of miscegenation can be found in Erena Mannering, the half-caste Maori woman in Boldrewood's 1899 novel *War to the Knife*.

<sup>47</sup> This form of social 'passing' contrasts with that of Warrigal, who is threatening because he can vanish into the indigenous population, and indeed into the landscape.

It later emerges, however, that Possie also synthesizes the worst traits of her mixed heritage: her Norman imperiousness and her indigenous recklessness, glimpsed separately earlier in the narrative, surface together at a steeplechase where, by overtaking her horse, she brings about her own death. Jesse grieves deeply for two years, but ultimately her death releases him from the 'collar' of his infatuation so he can go on to marry an English girl, the unprepossessing but eminently suitable Nellie Thoresby. Thus miscegenation is flirted with but decisively extinguished as a possibility. In the words of Brissenden: 'there can be no miscegenation in Arcadia'.<sup>48</sup> The future set out for Jesse and Nellie as an Anglo-Australian couple is one in which their purpose, apart from breeding livestock, is to fulfil their racial destiny by reproducing themselves. This they dutifully do, as is indicated by the reference to Jesse's ten children (p. 2), who in turn produce the clutch of grandchildren who gather around his feet as he tells his tale.

It is in the novel's conclusion that Boldrewood's pastoralist fantasy most notably departs from Scott's historical allegory. It is true that in both cases the racial Others have been regretfully but definitively dispatched while we are left with ideal English and Anglo-Australian types. However, while Scott's emphasis is on the value of ethnic difference, Boldrewood's is on the virtue of sameness. No further interminglings are desirable, or indeed necessary. The very composite nature of Anglo-Australian identity renders it infinitely reproducible without degeneracy. This establishing of a paradoxical 'mixed purity' allows Boldrewood to come up with an ingenious solution to what Dixon calls the 'impossible condition' of English racial renewal: 'that Britons should somehow renew themselves while preserving their "racial" and cultural integrity on the frontier'.<sup>49</sup> As was signalled earlier, the prospect of colonial fusion is instead displaced onto class in the novel, as the social inversion dramatized throughout the narrative ultimately gives way to a joyous intermingling of classes in which Jesse marries Nellie, who is further up the colonial social scale than he, and his sister Jane marries the now-reformed gentleman Jack Leighton. This new unity of race, class, and merit is, finally, sealed through a parcelling out of land without any reference to the dispossession that has made this possible. And so the text's conclusion, with its newly minted squattocrats asserting their rightful claim to 'land for free' (p. 43), leaves off where Boldrewood's other novels begin.

<sup>48</sup> Alan Brissenden, *Rolf Boldrewood*, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure*, p. 129.

And yet *A Sydney-Side Saxon* contains a single intriguing detail that complicates this rather neat picture of racial sameness and continuity. The novel's opening chapter, narrated by 'Bandra Jim' (who never reappears), offers an admiring portrait of the aged and prosperous Jesse ensconced in his grand homestead surrounded by his abundant progeny. In this chapter we come across a figure who we realize, upon completing the novel, embodies a striking 'return' of Possie Barker. This figure is none other than Cissie, the youngest daughter of Jesse and Nellie. Despite her fully English parentage, Cissie's 'tall and dark' appearance makes her noticeably like the half-Aboriginal Possie, who is also dark and of tall stature (p. 93). Bandra Jim also describes Cissie as having 'eyes like a flying doe – soft like, and yet bright' (p. 3), a description that is remarkable for its closeness to Jesse's lovestruck account of Possie's charms: 'When she walked ... she put me in mind of [a] tame doe ... [h]er eyes were so dark and soft (when she liked) that they made her more and more like some shy, light-stepping wild creature' (p. 103). Furthermore, like Possie, Cissie has also become somewhat haughty and imperious as a result of her education. In Cissie, then, it seems Possie has come back to life as a kind of displaced presence.

This arresting detail suggests yet another, arguably unwitting, parallel between Boldrewood's and Scott's novels, as the unexpected return of Possie recalls Rebecca's incomplete exit from the scene of *Ivanhoe*. In a Jamesonian interpretive gesture, Ragussis characterizes Rebecca's lingering presence in the mind of the now-married Wilfred of *Ivanhoe* as an unresolved psychic-ideological tension, 'the scar of unfulfilled erotic desire and the scar of unresolved historical guilt'.<sup>50</sup> The same could be said of Possie's ghostly resurrection as Cissie, who is a kind of wish-fulfilment figure, a physical manifestation of unforgotten love and of unacknowledged historical guilt that Possie was ultimately the sacrificial indigene over whose corpse Jesse's union with Nellie was formed. Miscegenation has been discounted as an option in both novels, but it continues to haunt the fringes of their narratives as an unfulfilled longing.

Boldrewood's final novel *The Last Chance* suggests that he was not immune to Rebecca's lingering allure; for here we find his characters describing her as 'the true heroine of that delightful novel *Ivanhoe*' and delighting in Thackeray's famous rewriting of *Ivanhoe*'s conclusion, which they say 'absolutely destroys

<sup>50</sup> Ragussis, 'Writing Nationalist History', p. 205.



Rowena, who settled down as a worthy mate for the doltish Athelstane'.<sup>51</sup> Yet unlike Scott, who deliberately presents Rebecca's re-entrance at the novel's end as, to quote Ragussis, 'a kind of psychic intrusion ... upon the consciousness of England',<sup>52</sup> the oblique and incoherent return of the repressed into the racial paradigm of *A Sydney-Side Saxon* does not function as an indictment against the ethnocentrism of Anglo-Australian society. It is, I wish to argue, altogether more unconscious, and thus also suggestive of the bad conscience at the novel's core which is unresolved because it is never truly acknowledged. A similar argument is taken up by J. J. Healy, who claims that the 'confusions that accompanied the creation' of Boldrewood's indigenous characters 'were psychological confusions rather than failures of literary technique'.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, while Rebecca's presence lingers at the end of *Ivanhoe*'s narrative, Cissie's fleeting appearance at the novel's opening is gradually erased as Boldrewood's story of English triumph unfolds.

I suggested earlier that Boldrewood's didacticism, language, and outmoded worldview have presented an obstacle to his continuing popularity for Australian audiences. It is arguable, however, that another reason Boldrewood's work has been forgotten is that it does not reflect the appealing image of the 1880s and 1890s as the *Bulletin* era and the crucible of the labour movement. *A Sydney-Side Saxon*, with its romantic nostalgia and meritocratic values, is the antithesis of the much-admired Australian realism epitomized by the work of Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy. Boldrewood's novels encapsulate, rather, the values of conservative Australia in the late nineteenth century – an Australia which, de Serville claims 'produced a library of novels, short stories, memoirs, essays and occasional pieces, much of which was overlooked by subsequent generations'.<sup>54</sup> While conservative writers such as Boldrewood offer a less flattering image of Australia's past, and one that intrudes upon self-congratulatory myths of Australian anti-authoritarianism, it is important to include them in our collective memory of Australian nationhood. Acknowledging their presence alongside the more progressive writers of late nineteenth-century Australia takes us further toward

<sup>51</sup> *The Last Chance*, p. 364. In Thackeray's continuation, *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance upon Romance* (1850), Ivanhoe leaves Rowena and eventually finds Rebecca, and marries her once she has converted to Christianity.

<sup>52</sup> Ragussis, p. 202.

<sup>53</sup> Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> De Serville, *Rolf Boldrewood: A Life*, p. 295.

explaining Australia's complexity as a nation, and allows us to better understand Anglo-Australians' historical (and continuing) ambivalence about their cultural and constitutional relationship to England.

Boldrewood's conservative Australia, says de Serville

valued its past and valued its continuity. In fact it had two pasts to look back upon, its Australian past (with its periods of prosperity and reverses) and its British past (its cultural inheritance) ... the past, after all, had made it what it was.<sup>55</sup>

An understanding of the literature of conservative Australia is thus especially important to those working on Australian medievalism; for as *A Sydney-Side Saxon* attests, it is here that one is most likely to find an exploration of the continuities between the Old World and the New. Examining the role of medievalism in this quest for continuity enables us to gain an insight into the many ways, whether predictable or surprising, that the Middle Ages have signified in Australia's colonial and post-colonial cultural consciousness. It also puts us in a position where we can appreciate more fully the unique contribution Australians have made to the hugely complex discursive field of medievalism.

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<sup>55</sup> De Serville, p. 296.